



perspective distortion by kate langdon

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Summary: Joan wants her brother back. Steve wants Nancy. They get a mystery instead. Fem!Jonathan/Steve :) T for now

1. The Faceless Man

Synopsis

Joan wants her brother back. Steve wants Nancy. They get a mystery instead. Fem!Jonathan/Steve :)

IMPORTANT CHARACTER CHANGES:

- 1) Nancy is OOC. She's a slightly meaner and more jealous person. She's still friends with Barb but more likely to approve of people like Tommy and Carol because they're popular. Lol sorry Nancy stans.
 - 2) Steve is slightly more mature than he was in Season 1. But he's not at the same level of development as Season 2 Steve.
 - 3) And most importantly: Jonathan is a girl.
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Perspective Distortion

Fucking crazy bitch, Steve thought. Should've looked where she was going. His blood was hot, and the idea that he was in the wrong did not even for a millisecond cross his mind.

Steve had turned the key in the ignition and pulled out of the space he'd snagged that morning in the high school parking lot, and then there'd been a bump. A loud thwack on his car. He was sure he hadn't hit anyone; it was more like they hit him. He turned, wide eyed, to face the rear window. There stood Jane or Joan (he wasn't sure which) and her little brother. The boy's eyes were just as wide as Steve's, but the boy's were wide with fear rather than disbelief. The girl was shaking her head, her hand on the rear of his car. That had been the bump.

He didn't give it a thought and suddenly he was out of his car and walking over to them.

"I was pulling out." He said, now stood directly before them.

Her head tilted.

Steve was pissed. "You slapped my car."

"You- you started pulling out into me and my little brother." Her cheeks started to fill with rosy red. "Was I supposed to let you hit us?"

"But I swear I checked no one was coming," Steve ironed out, "I guess I'm sorry I nearly ran the freak over."

"C'mon, Will. Let's go." She wrapped her arm around the boy's shoulder and tugged him past Steve. She made sure to knock her shoulder into Steve's as she passed.

"Watch yourself." Steve said, not minding how much he sounded like Tommy H.

Her and the boy walked over to a piece of shit car – and Steve stomach was set aflame with anger when she scowled over her shoulder at him before she climbed into the car and drove out of the lot.

Stupid bitch.

CHAPTER ONE: THE FACELESS MAN

'HAVE YOU SEEN ME?' the poster asked. Will Byers smiled in the photograph; his green eyes alight. Of course, on the lost poster they were grey. And the description of his green eyes (along with his height, weight, hair color and all the necessary specifics of his appearance) did not even come close to describing those eyes.

Joan tilted her head. (*Will I ever see those eyes again? In person, and not in some picture I took?*)

It was maddening to Joan. How could her little brother just vanish? With friends one moment, gone the next. Was this his choice? Did he run away? Did the familiar tune (*should I stay or should I go now?*) play out in his head. Or - and this was more likely - was he taken? Joan hoped to find out. But she feared the truth. It was some great

big Thing – a Thing that once known could never be unknown or stripped from her memory. If Will was dead-

(*No. Don't think that.*)

Sniffling and blinking back tears, Joan flattened the poster against the board before stabbing the gold pins into the fleshy cork surface. Stab. Stab. Stab. Her last pin stabbed into the last corner and then she stepped back to look upon her work. It was like driving past a car crash; you couldn't look away.

'*HAVE YOU SEEN ME?*'

The question was odd. She tried to imagine Will saying it, but her mind came up blank each time. Most people around here had seen him at some point or another. It was a small town, after all. Everyone knew or at least recognised each other. So, 'yes' would be a lot of people's answer.

'*Yes, I saw him at school last Friday.*'

'*Yes, I saw him at the store.*'

'*Yes, I saw him on his bike.*'

'*Yes, I saw him climb into a stranger's dirty white van and didn't think anything of it.*'

Joan inwardly scolded herself for thinking of that possible scenario; it caused her nose to tingle with the promise of tears. Again. She really wished she could stop crying. Her eyes blinked and settled on Will's smile. She took the photo on a bright cold day last September, when the trees were bare, and the skies were white.

Yesturday, she'd driven him over to the Wheeler's house and said 'see you later' as he got out. She didn't even bother to watch him cross the road safely and make it inside the Wheeler's before she drove off to work. And, when her overtime had finished, she'd been too tired to check on him before heading off to bed and falling asleep in her underwear. She simply thought he was there when she got back – like he always had been before. He'd been gone all night and she hadn't even realised.

'HAVE YOU SEEN ME?'

Was saying goodbye to him on Sunday the last time I would see him?

Will I see him again?

Her eyes closed. She breathed in. And then she felt it. *Them*. Eyes. Sets of eyes on her. These eyes probably pitied or accused and thought her or her mother were the cause of Will's vanishing. It would have struck her as odd if people had been looking at her last week or last year but now she's the girl whose brother had gone missing. She told herself to get used to the staring.

She turned. Her breath caught as she found a group of people looking at her. Tommy H. Carol. Steve Harrington. The Terrible Trio. They were in the vast majority of people she did not like.

What caught her off-guard about this scene were the two others stood beside them. Barbara; a seemingly sweet bookworm, introverted like Joan herself. And Nancy; a suburban girl who Joan thought could do better than being just another suburban girl. Joan didn't like them, but she didn't dislikethem – if that made sense. They seemed nice enough and didn't give her a reason to not like them, but never a reason to add them to the list of people she did like – which was a small list.

Nancy and Barbara stared on with empathy in their eyes. Tommy and Carol held morbid curiosity in their stares with just a hint of 'I know you're not innocent' mocking her.

Steve... she couldn't place it. There was sadness or pity or both and it was mixed with something else too. Joan thought the act of trying to place it was like when you had a word or an idea on the tip of your tongue, but, no matter what, the word wouldn't come to liberate your mind.

Maybe he ran Will over like he nearly did to both of them the other day... she couldn't tell whether that was actually something to follow up or whether her frazzled (and worried out of her damn mind) state made that seem plausible.

It was all too confusing to think about, so she blinked and turned from them – from *him* and the poster and left the hallway. As she walked to her car, the distant school bell only mirrored the ringing that had been nonstop in her ears since finding out Will had vanished.

"That's the thing about perverts, y'know." Steve said, adjusting the collar of Joan's jacket. That one move, that one touch was Steve's way of saying that he could anything he wanted to Joan. She was helpless, as was how she had felt since walking out to the parking lot and finding that the unholy trinity plus the ginger girl from her art class, all with matching looks of superiority and mocking humour.

Steve continued; "They just can't help themselves."

He ripped the photos (ones of him and Nancy kissing and undressing) and the tearing noise cut into her before he dropped them to floor of the parking lot. Behind, Tommy sniggered.

"So," Steve said, walking back to where Joan's bag sat atop her car – it had been confiscated and ransacked for the photos by a very enthusiastic Carol. "We'll just have to take away her toy."

"No, please! Not the camera." Joan stepped forward, hands raising to stop him.

Tommy stepped in front of her, blocking the path to the camera and allowing Steve to get it. Joan, now wide eyed, backed away from Tommy's much larger form. He could snap her in two and chew on her bones like cowboys did with toothpicks if he wanted.

"No, Tommy wait." Steve said, and Tommy – being the good henchman he was – stepped away, a sadistic chuckle aimed at Joan as he went. Steve stepped toward her, the camera held in his outstretched hand. "Here ya go."

Joan swallowed down the lump in her throat as he held the camera out. He couldn't mean to give the camera back so easily. Joan looked at the camera and then at Steve's eyes. Brown and warm – but off. Joan knew the warmth in his eyes could quickly become stifling. He

nodded once before he told her to take it.

"Go on, it's okay." Steve said. "I don't bite."

From behind Steve, Tommy and Carol sniggered again like quiet hyenas – only quiet laughs; they didn't want to miss anything good.

Joan tentatively reached out for the camera. Before her fingertips even tickled the camera's cold surface, his hand turned. He let it fall.

It crashed.

She flinched when she heard glass shatter.

Her dead camera lay among the torn pictures. Joan wanted to shout at him, slap him, punch him, make him somehow feel the same way she did when she heard the glass break. But she didn't. She stayed still, eyes down-cast onto the shards of glass that reflected light from the bright grey sky above.

"Come on, let's go. The game's about to start." Steve said to them, voice cold and aloof as he began walking away.

He acted as though he hadn't just ripped away the only friend left to Joan. Will, her mom going borderline crazy, Lonnie, and now the camera. It would take ages to save up for a new one, and there was no way in hell Joan was telling Joyce- not with Will missing.

"Boo!" Tommy smirked as he passed her. A weight settled in her gut.

"Tommy." Steve called from 10 paces away, before he gestured for the rest of them to follow. "Come on."

"Buh-bye!" Carol sang as she walked over the glass, ripping more photos and scattering them like confetti as she went. The fragments of the torn pictures landed on the crash site.

They followed Steve Harrington away like sheep, even Nancy, who Joan thought had been too nice to hang around with these people, left her there. When they were distanced enough, she knelt down, knees hitting the concrete as she hurried to assess the damage.

"Steve!" Tommy called. Joan didn't want to look over at them, she couldn't stomach it. She sniffed, as my eyes started to fog up again. Joan blinked as I held the camera on my lap. The first tear fell, trailing down her cheek like hot ice. It felt like failure; failure to keep the tears at bay, and to keep her pictures of that night a secret.

"Gimme a sec!" The King shouted back. Footsteps ran toward her. She flinched as they came right next to her. Steve's Adidas sneakers stopped from across the crash site. He bent down and picked up some of the torn photos, before he piled them up in his hands.

Joan's eyes glanced up and met his in question. What more did he want? Again, that look that Joan couldn't place crossed his features. His brows creased, lips sucked in, eyes a warm brown. Steve saw the tear on her face and Joan expected him to laugh at her, call her a spineless freak or a cry baby but instead she saw a sliver of what might have been guilt. But then it vanished, and so did he, jogging over to Nancy and placing a hand on her shoulder as he stuffed his pocket with the torn pictures.

"Just making sure she can't tape them up later." He said to the others. But what he'd left out was that he'd thought he'd seen *something* on one of the photos. He was very sure he'd be the one taping them back together.

The only other funeral Joan had attended was her grandmother's. Lonnie's mother had smelt of potpuri and cigarettes. Going to her house had never failed to make Joan's chest wheeze, but to 6-year-old Joan the wheeze was worth-it as Gramma Betty had always treated her to *After Eights* if she'd been well behaved (and even sometimes when she hadn't). Joyce blamed her sweet tooth on Gramma Betty. Her funeral was held in the Old Church, the place they'd be sending off Will tomorrow before being buried.

Joan took in a shaky breath.

The funeral home she stood in smelt like oak trees and shoe polish. Her nose wrinkled. Coffins were presented around the room like cars in the dealership when Joyce had taken her to buy her second (or perhaps third or more likely fourth) hand car.

"It's made of soft wood with a crepe interior." The funeral director, who had introduced himself as Todd, spoke, his voice gliding through the fog in her mind. "Now, I don't know what your budget is but over here we have copper and bronze."

Joan sniffed; eyes red as she listened to Todd over the high-pitched whir in her ears.

She had no real clue as to what 'soft wood' was and she was equally as stumped by what a crepe interior might look like. She briefly thought of crepes (the food kind) and her mind went back to her sweet tooth and Gramma Betty.

Todd the funeral director led her over to where more caskets lay, and her stomach lurched when she pictured Will's pale blue body in one of them. He'd be dwarfed by one of these coffins. In an open casket, you'd be able to see from Will's head to his thighs, maybe even his knees. They'd probably tailor make one for Will – would that cost extra? She really didn't know anything about funerals. She didn't want to.

Walking in the middle of the room, Joan came to a halt as *he* came into view through the open door.

Steve Harrington.

Dick.

"Can we talk for a sec?" He asked.

Her eyes narrowed before she nodded, curious as to why he was here. He wasn't so mean as to mock her little brother's death, was he? If he was, he'd be punched. Several times.

"Just gimme a sec." Joan said to Todd the funeral director as she took a cautious step toward the doorway.

"Of course." He replied, his voice a soothing hum, like the purr of a cat – the most perfect voice for grieving people and he'd probably had many years of practice doing so.

I walked over to Steve, putting my hands in the pockets of my

pinafore.

"Uh, why are *you* here?" Joan asked, edgy.

"Listen, I just wanna talk." He tilted his head down.

She sniffed and carried on staring at him. He looked around at all the caskets, overwhelmed by them. *Welcome the club, asshole.* This room was like a punch to the face, a reminder that death was everywhere and came for everyone.

"Can we..." He trailed off before he gestured for them both to go into the hallway with his thumb.

"Can't this wait?" She asked.

He pulled at his hair. "No. I just – can we talk?"

"What about?"

"About one of your photos."

"Oh, those." She scowled.

"Yeah. C'mon." He sent one more wary look at the coffins before walking down the hall. Joan followed him to the bench. She sat. He remained standing above her. It felt awkward to say the least. He knelt in front of her whilst he shoved his hand in his back pocket. He looked as if he was a nervous boyfriend pulling out an engagement ring as he knelt down on one knee. That thought made her scowl deepen.

Steve pulled a piece of paper out before he unfolded it and held it out for her to take. She took it between her fingertips. Anger coiled in her chest as she spotted at the tape he'd used to repair it. *He'd taped it together, just like he said I would've done.* His sheep friends had laughed at his theory about Pervy Joan.

"There." Steve tapped a spot on the photo with his index finger. Joan never really noticed how thick boys' fingers could be in comparison to hers until then. "What's that? Is it just a blur or something? 'Cause you took it so I just thought you'd know."

Barbara sat on the diving board, and in that snapshot of a moment she was saying she was alone, forgotten. It was a haunting picture, even more so now it had been torn apart. To Joan the tape and tears managed to gift it a lonely, eerie sort of beauty. She studied it more, suddenly conscious of Steve studying her. The shape he pointed to at the edge of the photograph could've just been a blur or maybe even dirt on the lens.

"I mean, it looks like it could be some kind of perspective distortion but..." She shook her head. "...I wasn't using a wide angle... I'm sorry, I don't know."

"Was anyone else was there?" He asked, brown eyes helpless as they looked up at her.

"No." Her head shook. "She was there one second and then... she was gone. I figured she bolted."

He exhaled, and Joan felt his breath fan out onto her knees and edge the hem of her denim dress. Gooseflesh bubbled up just as a familiar feeling stirred in her stomach. Steve Harrington had just made her feel... *ew*.

"Nanc' told me the cops think Barbara ran away, but she isn't convinced." Steve looked down at the picture. "When I was at my house last night, I went to where the picture was taken, and I thought I... saw something. Some weird guy or..." He shook his head.

He looked at the picture as if lost for a moment, then he shook his head and looked around as if trying to remember where he was.

"I uh, I guess I shouldn't be asking you this right now..." He stood. The light coming from the end of the empty hallway made the tips of his hair glow white. He towered over Joan. "I shouldn't have come today, not when you're..." He looked down the hall to the entrance of the coffin room. He started to bolt.

"What'd he look like?" She called.

He turned to face her with cold brown eyes.

"This man you saw in the woods." Joan said, leaning forward on the

bench. "What'd he look like?"

"He um," He swallowed as he struggled for a description. "It sounds crazy. It *is* crazy."

"Tell me." Joan said.

Steve licked his lips and rubbed them together as he decided what words to use. "It was- it looked like he didn't-"

"Didn't have a face?"

He remained silent for a moment; his head turned an inch to the side as his already wide eyes seemed to get bigger. There was a fog of fear that swam across his eyes, dulling the brown.

He asked; "How did you know that?"

chapter 1 is always rough for me oof

hope you liked it! Let me know if u want more x

2. The Dark Room

Hey hey!

I experimented with writing both dialogue from the show and dialogue from my brain! Please tell me which you prefer

I originally wrote this in Joan's POV so if there's any parts that say 'me', 'my', 'I', etc. then I apologise and ask that you kindly point them out to me in a review. Thank u!

Hope you enjoy!

"He um," He swallowed as he struggled for a description. "It sounds crazy. It is crazy."

"Tell me." Joan said.

Steve licked his lips and rubbed them together as he decided what words to use. "It was- it looked like he didn't-"

"Didn't have a face?"

He remained silent for a moment; his head turned an inch to the side as his already wide eyes seemed to get bigger. There was a fog of fear that swam over his eyes, dulling the brown.

Dread dripped from his lips as he asked: "How did you know that?"

CHAPTER TWO: THE DARK ROOM

"Sooo..." Steve started from his spot atop the counter on the wall furthest away from Joan in the dark room. Joan could tell he had no clear direction where to go with his words.

The silence must be grating on him.

The car ride here wasn't any different. They'd gone in his car – she

hadn't trusted herself to drive anywhere, not when at any time her eyes could dampen so much so that she couldn't see the road ahead. Their journey to the school and then though the empty corridors had been awkward – the only noise came from the students in the classrooms which surrounded them, but even then, it wasn't much to dispel the quiet.

Joan was used to it though. She lived in the silence between noise. Joan thought; Steve Harrington – The King of Hawkins – was not one for an empty silence. She imagined him always having people around. He was probably never alone, never quiet, never caught in an awkward silence or a long pause. But the moments where he was surrounded by silence, like now, must have been excruciating.

"...what're you doing?" Steve asked.

"Brightening and enlarging." Joan said, she twisted the dial as she lined up the measurements.

He hopped down from his spot making Joan jump.

"Ha, scaredy cat." He sniggered.

She furled her brow at him. *Maybe he's trying to be nice?* she asked herself before getting back to work. Steve thought the crease between her brows was kind of funny. It made a little 'T' shape that he didn't think was cute. Nope. Not cute. *Not at all.*

"What else did your mom say about this thing?" He asked, needing the distraction. He placed a hand onto the counter she was working on. Joan didn't feel all that comfortable with him *this* close, but he was who he was. Getting close with girls was par for the course. *Not that he'd think I was 'a girl', an unattractive mess, yes. But a girl? Like Nancy?* Joan tried not to think about that as she rushed to answer him.

"Not a lot." She said, then span the dial to further enlarge the image. "Just that it came out the wall."

Steve huffed, and in the corner of her eye she saw his arms cross as he leant his head back. The skin of his long neck, normally pale, was

now red from the light – just like everything else in the room – and Joan spied a light peppering of moles masquerading as a constellation against his pale-red skin. She wondered what shape they made.

He brought his head back down and caught her eyes. He raised an eyebrow.

She couldn't stop her mouth. "You know, there's a thing I heard about people with moles on their necks when I was a kid."

"You were looking at my neck because...?" He angled his body toward hers, one hand leaning on the counter while the other found his hip.

"Uh..." Her mouth, wide, like a fish.

He sniggered – though not as cruelly as she thought he might – before saying;

"Relax, Byers. You can look," He wagged a finger at me, playful. "just remember, I'm taken."

"Ugh. That's- as if I'd- nevermind." She huffed.

"As if you'd wha-"

The timer went off. Steve flinched.

"Guess I'm not the only scaredy cat." Joan smirked as she reached up and flicked off the switch on the wall, silencing the timer. She placed the paper into the tray, praying this picture captured something but at the same time wishing that monsters would stay imaginary.

"What about people with moles on their necks then?" He asked.

"Someone said they're more likely to become famous."

Steve's mouth pouted in thought.

"But! That's stupid. You know, because most people have moles on their necks. So, I don't know why I brought it up." But Joan *did* know.

She'd brought it up so that somehow, he'd think she wasn't a creep for looking at his neck as long as she did. And although she'd only looked for a few seconds, to her, it felt much longer.

Her cheeks darkened. Thank God for the red light.

"I guess that's kind of interesting." He 'hmmed'. "Tammy said I looked like Tom Cruise. Think I could be on the big screen?"

Again, words came out like vomit. "No screen is big enough for your head. Or your hair."

Fuck. She paused. Sucked in her cheeks. Closed her eyes. Braced for impact.

But nothing came. If he was Tommy H. she was almost sure he would've blown up. She opened her eyes and dragged them to his. He was *smiling*. Not just smiling. *Laughing*. She could hear it now. Loud, guffawing.

She joined in too. Relieved in her disbelief.

After a few more seconds the laughter died, and silence took over again.

Steve wondered how long it had been since someone had made him laugh at himself. Laughing at others was constant with Tommy H. and Carol. They made it fun. Though, it was a cruel kind of laughter. Sometimes he felt sickly from making others feel bad. He gritted his jaw, knowing that being mean was his own fault. Then again, he wouldn't be so mean if other people were just more normal.

He looked at Joan, her messy hair and her chipped nail polish. If she was more like other girls, she would've giggled at whatever dumb thing he'd said, flirted with him and tugged on her hair as if that'd make her brain catch up to the world around her. She would've popped gum like Carol. She'd wear cutesy clothes that made boys want to know if their underwear was just as cute like Lauren. She'd have smoked a cigarette with the boys at a house party like Tammy.

She would never have messy hair. She would never have chipped nail polish. She would never have joked about his ego and he wouldn't

have laughed as hard as he had right now. He guessed that's why he liked Nancy so much: no had ever dared call him an idiot before – except his father.

Maybe Joan doesn't have to be normal... No, not 'maybe', he decides. She doesn't have to be normal like the other girls.

He carried on studying her from the side. Her nose was straight with a dusting of barely visible freckles which trailed up along her cheek to her cheekbone. Her eyes were brown, like his, yet they looked black under the red light. He wondered if they were hazel in disguise. Some eyes hide things from far away and it's only when you up close that you see the secrets.

"It should be done soon." She said, bringing him back to where they were now; trying to figure out if Barb had been snagged by some faceless guy.

"Have you been interested in photo...ing... photo-ing long?" He asked, eyebrows raised as he scratched the back of his long neck.

"Photoing?" Joan paused as she moved the photo tray with both hands so that the liquid inside moved back and forth. "Photography?"

"That's the one." He nodded as he clicked his fingers and pointed at her. She nearly smiled at the goofy grin that was made complete by his hair bouncing along with every nod of his head.

"Yeah." Her shoulders gave a light shrug as she returned my focus to the developing photo. "I guess I'd rather observe people than, you know..."

"Speak?" Steve said. A smirk settled onto his face.

"I know." She avoided meeting his eyes. "It's weird. I'm weird."

"Yep, you are." Steve said.

She met his eyes, thinking that he meant it maliciously, but the longer she studied him, the friendlier the smirk looked. There was a not-so-hidden playfulness in the tilt of his mouth that she *liked*.

Weird, she mused before she said; "yep, that's me" before she darted her head down once more to escape his black whirlpool eyes.

She heard him give a small laugh, before he leant down onto the counter, mirroring her position as he pushed his upper arm against hers with his shoulder a few inches taller than her own.

"It's just..." She trailed off, not sure why she was about to tell Steve of all people about such a personal part of her. Yet when she looked at him – and there was only about ten inches between their noses now – she saw the softness of his eyes telling her to go on.

In other words, she completely forgot that he was a camera smashing dickhead.

She nodded her head away from him and said "... sometimes, people never really say what they're thinking but if you capture the right moment..." She looked back at him. "...it says more."

"Huh... never thought about it like that." Steve said. He breathed out a huff of air. It hit her cheek. A light minty gust. Despite the coolness of it, she felt her cheeks heat up as if hit by fire.

"What did I say?" He bumped his shoulder into hers, a friendly nudge.

"Huh?" She said, looking at him with a creased brow. The 'T' shaped crease was not cute, Steve was sure of it.

"When you took my picture." He smiled, before he bit his lip. "What was I saying?"

"Oh... I shouldn't have done that to you and Nancy." Joan said, pressing her hand to her mouth, trying to stop her jaw from shaking. "Sorry."

"I shouldn't have broken your camera." His eyes darted away from hers. Joan thought she saw a sliver of guilt, like the one she thought she saw after he broke her camera. "With everything happening, y'know, with yuh-your brother. I'm a dick."

"Yep, you are." She repeated his earlier words, trying to be humorous. She couldn't help the way her chest constricted with the shock of

what he'd said. *He was capable of being compassionate?* Her thought was laced with sarcasm.

She said; "So, you're sorr-"

"Holy shit. That's the thing I saw." Steve interrupted, upper lip curled in revulsion as he pointed down to the photograph. The faceless man stood there, rippled and inky black as it towered above Barbara. "What is that?"

"The faceless man." She said. "That must've been what my mom saw. I thought she was crazy... when we were in the morgue, she said it wasn't Will's body. She said that he's alive."

"So, if he's alive-" Steve began.

"Barbara must be too." Joan said, eyebrows raised as they locked eyes.

Both sets of brown eyes were still adjusting to the brightness of the white walls and sterile lights of Hawkins High, home of the Tigers.

"When's the funeral?" Steve said, squinting at the empty hallway. It was nearly lunchtime. He rubbed absentmindedly at his stomach.

"Uh, tomorrow." She replied.

"Are you gonna be okay?" He asked, voice quiet. She was still sceptical of whether Steve actually cared or not.

"Why wouldn't I be?" Joan asked, shrugging as she turned to face him. "I just found out that my brother could be alive. I'm worried, yeah. But relieved. I just have to brood and play at being sad for a couple hours tomorrow until the funeral's over and everybody leaves."

"It'll still be, you know, *sad* though." He said, eyes darting around as if scared to talk about it. "I was just gonna ask if-"

"You want to come?" Joan said, looking at him with wide eyes. She inwardly scolded herself. The words had left the confines of her chest

before her lips could restrict their exit, just as they had done in the dark room. What was wrong with her today? Maybe it had something to do with being around someone as annoying as Harrington. He made her go off-kilter as he acted as her side kick in the *Journey to Find Will Byers*.

"I, um..." He started, and she was convinced he would say no. "Yeah. I'll come. As long as I'm not intruding or anything?"

"No, no." Her head shook. "I'll let my mom know. I mean, you're going to help find Will. And Barbara," she added her name, forgetting the real reason why she suspected he was here; to get back into Nancy's pants by saving Barbara. "So, I guess you deserve a place at his fake funeral. 9AM, cemetery." She nodded.

"I'll be there." He said. "Wait, I should wear a suit, right?"

"Yeah," she exhaled a laugh. "I think that'd be best."

"Wanna ride home?" He asked.

Joan smiled, nodded. Steve smiled back.

Since when was Steve tolerable? Joan's stomach felt off, like before going into an exam. But Steve wasn't an exam or a test she could fail – and she would fail. She was beginning to understand that he was harder to read than she thought.

They exited the school and walked through the parking lot in silence, the kind Joan felt comfortable in. Every time she glanced at him, his deep brown eyes seemed to be lost, focused on what thoughts he held under his big brown hair.

"Um, are you okay?" Joan said as she walked closer to his side.

"Yeah... fine." He stared at the sun, observing the gold which faded to pink which faded to blue, but Joan could tell he wasn't busy taking in the sky's beauty.

"I hate when people ask me this, but... you're sure you're fine?" Joan said.

We stopped in front of his car. He leant against it, one arm on the roof with his hand musing his hair before going down and rubbing at his face.

"Steve?"

His eyes jerked open.

"You okay?" She asked.

He didn't answer. "You've got an eyelash on your cheek."

"What? Oh," she swiped at her cheeks, "gone?"

"No." He points a finger at the left cheek. "Under your eye."

She wiped where he pointed but just missed the dainty lash.

"Gone?"

"No. Let- let me."

She held still. Neither noticed how they both held their breath as his hand reached out to her cheek, fingers feather light as they pinched away the lash.

He held it between them. "Make a wish."

For a second her lips almost quirked into a smile.

She knew what to wish for.

Overhead, the sky greyed as Hawkins' way of warning the two that whatever was in town was here to stay for a while. Joan had a felling it would snow this winter.

Hope you enjoyed it! It's 2AM now lol I need sleep. Please let me know your thoughts 3

If you like Billy, I've got a Billy/OC called Crimson Wings waiting for you to read on my profile/bio thing. It's 26 chapters long *so far* so there's plenty for you to read if you want

something long :)